



POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

## State lawmaker defends dual jobs in Senate, Trump administration

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State Sen. Doug Ericksen on Thursday defended his role at the Environmental Protection Agency, saying he could handle his Senate responsibilities while also helping the Trump administration.

In a news conference, Ericksen, a Republican from Ferndale, stressed that his job was only temporary, and hasn't hindered the Senate or an environmental committee he chairs.

"We're getting the work done," Ericksen said.

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Ericksen is one of 10 people on the EPA transition team and is serving as the team's communications director in Washington, D.C., for up to 120 days, he said. Because of the job, he has missed significant time in Olympia during the first few weeks of the legislative session.

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The Bellingham Herald reported this week that before Wednesday, Ericksen hadn't made a committee meeting in more than two weeks, drawing criticism from some Democrats he was slowing the committee process.

They also criticized him for making the Senate work around his schedule. Since a GOP-led coalition owns a slim 25-24 lead in the chamber, Ericksen has to be present for them to pass legislation.

Ericksen sought to quell concerns Thursday, saying people questioning whether he is spending enough time at the Capitol "are doing it for partisan reasons."

He pointed to Wednesday as evidence the Senate was functioning properly.

Once Ericksen arrived in town in the afternoon, the chamber passed several bills. Late Wednesday night, Ericksen had an executive session to vote eight bills out of his committee.

When he's absent, Ericksen said the committee vice chairman — state Sen. Tim Sheldon, a conservative Democrat from Shelton who caucuses with Republicans — can run business.

Wednesday didn't go 100 percent smoothly, however. Ericksen arrived in Olympia later than expected after his initial flight from Washington, D.C., was canceled. He had scheduled a news conference for Wednesday morning but had to push it to Thursday.

Ericksen said lengthy travel and delays aren't unusual for him. They can happen to "to every single" lawmaker "who's trying to get to Olympia after a weekend home with their family," he said.

For example, he said, snow blocking mountain passes could delay lawmakers driving from the east side of the state.

At the news conference, Ericksen also defended himself against claims that holding a job in the federal government while being a senator is unethical and illegal.

Bellingham Democratic Precinct Committee Officer Michael Shepard has lodged a complaint with the Legislative Ethics Board that alleges Ericksen is not spending enough time in the Senate and that his dual office-holding breaks state law.

Ericksen said Thursday he has consulted with lawyers in the state Senate, outside legal experts and EPA staff to ensure holding the two jobs is "both ethical and legal."

He maintains his job with the EPA is legal because it's only temporary. Ericksen has not yet released documents or information proving he was given that legal advice, but Thursday he pledged to do so.

State Democratic Party Chairwoman Tina Podlowski hit back at Ericksen in a news release, saying he was absent too much and threatening to take legal action if Ericksen doesn't quit the Senate.

"If Ericksen doesn't do the right thing himself and resign, Democrats will use every legal and political avenue we have to do the right thing for him and get him out of office," says her written statement.

Ericksen is forgoing his \$120 per day per diem while not in Olympia, but he is taking his full legislative salary. He said he still doesn't know how much he's being paid by the federal government.

"It's an incredible honor when the president of the United States — no matter what political party they belong to — invites you to be and asks you to be part of the first 200 people to work on the transition of the federal agencies," Ericksen said.

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Sen. Doug Ericksen, R-Ferndale, upper left, talks to reporters Thursday at the Capitol in Olympia. Ericksen, who is serving as a state senator and a member of President Donald Trump's transition team, said the GOP majority in the state Senate can rely on him, and that he's able to do both jobs. **Ted S. Warren** - The Associated Press

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